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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a faculty development and orientation program for new faculty at Montclair State University in New Jersey. The New Faculty Program (NFP) is designed to orient and introduce a diverse new faculty (more than half of whom are women and minorities) to the culture of the university, and to help them attain reappointment and tenure by enhancing their teaching skills and planning a scholarship and research agenda. The program includes weekly group cohort meetings and individual meetings with resource faculty (mentors). The teaching element of the program focuses on teaching for critical thinking, preparing students for participation in a democracy, sensitivity to the needs of a diverse student population, and instructional practices that engage and involve students in learning and encourage them to become lifelong learners. The roles of university administrators, resource faculty, and the NFP director in the success of the program are reviewed. (Contains 16 references.) (MDM)

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Faculty Development For Change and Choice

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Abstract

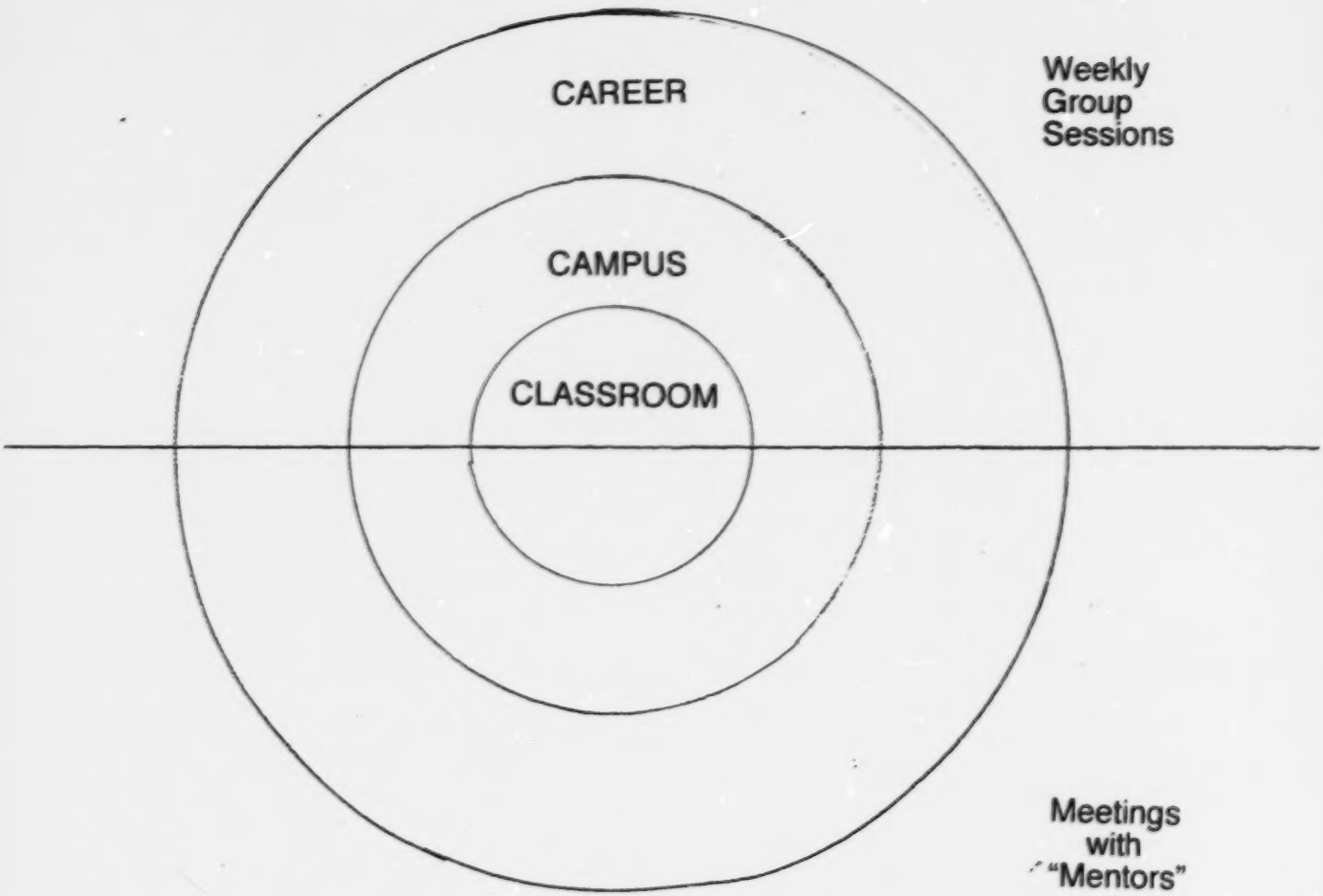
This paper describes a faculty development and orientation program for new faculty at a public teaching university. Its unique features and their benefits are discussed. Recommendations for establishing such a program are provided.

Faculty Development for Change and Choice: The New Faculty Program at MSU

In an era of downsizing, global competition in the marketplace, dissatisfaction with the results of our educational systems, attacks on tenure and demands for public accountability for the quality of graduates, colleges (especially those assisted by public funds) are taking action to respond to public concerns about the quality of teaching and levels of productivity of the professoriate. Montclair State University in New Jersey is one such institution. Having recently become a teaching university, Montclair is developing new doctoral programs, hiring new faculty and reexamining, redefining and clarifying its mission and goals.

The administration is committed to maintaining and enhancing the excellence of its faculty through various initiatives, one of which is the New Faculty Program (NFP), an extensive, bold and unique effort to orient and introduce a diverse new faculty (more than half of whom are women and minorities) to the culture of the university, and to help them attain reappointment and tenure by enhancing their teaching skills and planning a scholarship and research agenda (Boice, 1992).

The New Faculty Program was initiated in AY 1994-95 as a comprehensive faculty development program for incoming faculty, and substantial resources were committed to its success. The Program has a tripartite focus that can be visualized as three concentric circles, moving out from the core element of (1) the classroom to the contextual environment of (2) the campus and then to the long-range perspective of the faculty member's (3) career. It addresses these three elements by using a dual methodology of (a) cohort group sessions on a weekly basis and (b) flexibly scheduled meetings with resource faculty (advisers or "mentors") on an individual basis.


CAREER
CAMPUS
CLASSROOM
Weekly
Group
Sessions
Meetings
with
"Mentors"

FIGURE

Uniqueness of Design

The New Faculty Program is unique in its structure, the nature of its objectives, its university-wide scope, and the feedback to the system that results from its many linkages to the campus community. These will be discussed throughout this section under their respective headings.

Structure

First, the program is mandatory for all newly hired tenure track faculty with two year contracts. Program design combines the more structured format of a weekly two hour group session with opportunities to meet on an informal basis with an experienced faculty member.

New faculty are required to attend the weekly sessions for an entire academic year to (1) acquaint them with various administrative and support services throughout the university and (2) explore and examine all aspects of teaching and career development. Furthermore, an additional hour per week with a designated resource faculty member (a tenured, experienced professor) provides more individualized assistance with research projects, curriculum development and teaching strategies. Thus, the NFP serves as both orientation and professional development for the new hires.

Goals and Objectives

Broadly speaking, the program aims to (1) orient new faculty to the culture of the university and retain them; (2) develop a collegial atmosphere and counteract the isolation of teaching; (3) expose new faculty to best practices, which include critical thinking, educating for democracy and social responsibility, and student engagement in learning and (4) support career success and professional development.

A second unique characteristic is the value base upon which the program rests. Objectives reflect the tradition of a public university whose mission emphasizes best practices and excellence in teaching. Most significant among these are an emphasis on teaching for critical thinking (Brookfield, 1987; Giroux, 1983; Paul, 1990), preparing students for participation in a democracy, (Freire, 1985; Goodlad; Giroux, 1988), sensitivity to the needs of a diverse student population (Villegas, 1991), and instructional practices that engage and involve students in learning (Fernandez-Balboa and Marshall, 1994) and that encourage them to become lifelong learners (Knowles, 1980).

Because the program is long-term, comprehensive and well-structured, it affects the university in several ways: it honors teaching and the new faculty member by institutionalizing a program to which significant financial and human resources are committed; success of new faculty is enhanced because resource faculty and the cohort group itself help to develop and encourage scholarship agendas; teaching effectiveness and professional engagement with teaching is given a great deal of attention, thereby addressing an important public accountability issue, especially for public universities (Boice, 1992).

University Linkages

Third, program objectives are accomplished by making optimum use of university-wide resources. For example, new faculty are made aware of the services of the Division of Student Development and Campus Life through presentations by the vice president of the division and the dean of students, as well as representatives from various offices under their purview. Faculty who are experts in critical thinking and who work with the Institute for Critical Thinking conduct sessions on curriculum development and other aspects of integrating critical thinking concepts into teaching strategies. Seminars on diversity, student-centered learning, experiential methods, and the principles of the Center of Pedagogy's agenda for education in a democracy (Goodlad, 1994) also are an integral part of the curriculum. All these sessions rely on participation by unit directors, faculty and others involved with these projects.

Feedback

A fourth unique element is the feedback process that occurs through the utilization of campus-wide resources. The participation of professional staff, faculty and administrative officers who are called upon to share information about their area of expertise not only acquaints the newcomers with these key figures on campus and the services of their units, it also provides a feedback mechanism for the presenters themselves who may learn of unmet needs and can then improve their procedures and services. Thus, the university as a whole benefits from this aspect of the program.

Immediate feedback through group processing and formative evaluation is used to plan subsequent sessions. By voicing their opinions and feelings about the group sessions and participating in the planning of subsequent sessions, the new faculty take more responsibility for meeting their own learning needs and make a

greater commitment to the learning experience. Because each cohort of new faculty has its own distinctive characteristics (such as type of discipline and levels of prior experience in teaching and research), the program is modified each year to respond to the particular needs of each cohort. For instance, in a group that is widely diverse in terms of teaching experience in higher education settings, those with more experience may function as peer advisers for those with little or no experience in college teaching. They may demonstrate their instructional strategies at the weekly sessions or invite peers into their classrooms to observe an effective technique, as the resource faculty may also do. The process of ongoing evaluation and revision, therefore, insures the relevance and value of the program to new faculty.

Key Roles

Provost, Deans and Chairs

Commitment and cooperation by administration is crucial to the program's success. Under the auspices of the Office of Academic Affairs, the NFP enjoys the support it needs to function effectively. Cooperation is also necessary from department chairs in scheduling their new faculty's classes to enable them to fully participate in the weekly sessions. Deans are important figures in recommending qualified faculty to serve as advisers because they know which faculty members will be good at mentoring junior faculty. Unless these various linkages are strong, the program is threatened.

Resource Faculty

Resource faculty are the lifeblood of the program because they are usually the most personal and intimate point of contact that the new faculty have with the university. There are five resource faculty who represent each of the five colleges or

schools (3 colleges and 2 schools) of the university, each adviser "mentoring" as few as two or as many as four new faculty, depending on the size of the incoming cohort. In some instances, their relationship with the junior faculty member more closely resembles a true mentor-mentee interaction, but usually the resource faculty serve in a more limited advisory capacity while providing socioemotional support to their "mentees." In fact, an authentic mentoring role is hindered somewhat by the restriction against mentoring someone in the mentor's own school or college, a prohibition intended to minimize prejudice in the reappointment/tenure/promotion process. Advisers, therefore, are able to provide general advice and emotional support more than specific, instrumental guidance in a particular area of interest or discipline.

Program Director

Perhaps most essential to the program's success is an effective director. The role requires a multifaceted set of skills and qualities. She or he maintains a close and positive working relationship with administration, resource faculty and the campus community in general. She designs, develops and coordinates the program and facilitates the weekly sessions. She recruits and selects capable, committed resource faculty, makes clear their responsibilities and provides support for them. The director insures continuity and consistency in the program, thus providing a sense of security for the new faculty at a time when their anxiety levels are high.

The director, therefore, should have experience in human resource and staff development, program development and administration, and knowledge and skill in group dynamics. In the NFP at Montclair State University, the director is a tenured faculty member in the College of Education and Human Services who has a

background in counseling, adult education, management training and organization development.

Fidelity to Adult Education Principles

Even when the cohort of new faculty are widely diverse in terms of experience, academic discipline and professional background, they share the commonality of being adult learners who are struggling to understand and succeed in a new organizational culture--the university. Some are also adjusting to the environment of a new geographical region or even a new country. The first priority, therefore, is to establish a climate of trust within the group and a support system to ease the transition to a new job, new colleagues, new institution and new environs. Weekly group sessions are structured so that there is time for new faculty to become acquainted with one another and achieve a comfort level conducive to learning.

Outside of the group, resource faculty may help their mentees with all manner of problems ranging from those related to relocation (such as finding a good doctor or dentist) to giving advice about power relationships within the university. One of the most valuable functions of this one-on-one relationship between the mentee and her resource person is the sense of security in knowing there is someone to turn to should a problem arise.

Using Learners' Experiences

Using the expertise of the learners themselves as a valuable resource is probably the most important tenet of adult education (Knowles, 1980). As the group begins to bond and the members feel more at ease with one another, it is possible to ask them to share their knowledge of academic life and demonstrate their teaching

skills in the group sessions. They contribute to the learning process by demonstrating their own effective teaching methods, giving feedback to one another, sharing their knowledge, voicing their opinions and feelings about the group sessions, and participating in the planning of subsequent sessions. These interactions help to build competence and confidence in their capabilities (White, 1959) and a greater commitment to the learning experience.

Besides the intense involvement this approach engenders, it is also very efficient and effective in that participants who have earned the respect and credibility of their peers can influence and teach at least as well as the officially designated leader, especially when they have greater expertise in a certain area. If the director shares power to the extent that participants can emerge as experts and leaders whenever appropriate, then the power of the group to facilitate learning and to provide socioemotional support is optimized.

Fostering Engagement With Learning

The guest presenters from the various divisions of the university should be chosen with consideration for their understanding of the importance of active learning. They should be apprised of the interactive norm that has been fostered in the group so that they allow at least an open discussion forum with time for questions rather than a purely didactic presentation. Thus, some level of active involvement is desirable even when the primary purpose of the session is to provide information.

Varying methods to accommodate various learning styles is also advisable (Kolb, 1981). Analytic and conceptual activities should be balanced with reflective and concrete experiential exercises. Assigning challenging reading material to analyze and discuss at one session counterbalances another one that focuses on

the affective domain, for example. Attention to a mixed methodology ensures the engagement of all participants, regardless of learning style.

Guidelines and Recommendations

(a) Appoint an effective director with autonomy who can maintain a close working relationship with administration and resource faculty.

It is essential that the sponsoring administrative office (probably the Division of Academic Affairs) appoint an effective director who can function with a high degree of autonomy and yet maintain a close working relationship with administration, resource faculty, and the service units and divisions of the university. The capabilities outlined in the section on the director's role are essential attributes for this position.

(b) Address the needs and concerns of new faculty.

It is important continually to monitor and address the needs and concerns of new faculty by processing reactions to their experiences within the group sessions as well as the problems they encounter in their everyday lives on campus and in the classroom. Attention to these matters insures that the program is continually evolving to higher levels of effectiveness and relevance.

(c) Select capable, committed resource faculty and make clear their responsibilities.

The wealth of knowledge and experience that resource faculty contribute cannot be overestimated in accounting for the effectiveness of the NFP. The small stipend paid to these professors should not be their primary incentive but simply a token of appreciation for their efforts. The real motivating force should emanate from a desire to help young faculty to succeed in their careers (Kram,1985). Mentors' attendance at the group sessions is crucial for the developing group's sense of cohesion and this responsibility should be agreed upon when selecting mentors and scheduling their classes.

(d) Protect the integrity of the curriculum.

One way this is done is by adhering to the principle, "Practice what you preach"or in more arcane terms, insure congruence between espoused theory and theory in use (Argyris and Schon, 1980). For example, acknowledging and using the professional experience of all parties as a

resource demonstrates an important and effective adult education principle and models the participative, democratic approach to education that the program advocates. It is unwise to ask the new faculty to use methods in the classroom that contradict their own experience in the NFP. Presenters should be apprised of the interactive nature of the group sessions so that they are prepared to engage in discussion and dialogue rather than mere presentation of information. Of course, resource faculty should be chosen for their commitment to this principle, as well.

Although the program is responsive to each cohort's needs, the director must nevertheless maintain clarity of purpose. There may not be time to address every issue in weekly sessions and still achieve essential program goals (Brookfield, 1987). An optimum balance means being flexible within a strong structure and relying on resource faculty to attend to more individualized problems and needs.

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